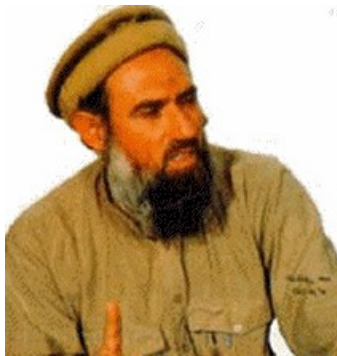


Combating Terrorism Center
Guest Commentary

**The Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's
Books**

**Part I: Strategic Leverage of the Soviet-Afghan
War to Undertake Perpetual Jihad**



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Introduction

Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, more than any other cleric, is considered the strategic founder of al-Qaida. His very utterances of the need to establish an *al-Qaida al-Sulba* (firm foundation) to export jihad where Muslims are persecuted is the name Bin Laden finally settled on when naming his organization al-Qaida. To understand Bin Laden and those who harbor sympathies to al-Qaida, as well as their strategic vision it is vital to re-discover Azzam's books. Part I of the series will look into a book published in 1984, and which by 1988 had gone through its eleventh printing; his Quranic interpretations of the Soviet-Afghan War, its significance and Azzam's mythologizing and marketing of this conflict to attract more Arabs to join the fight. The book is entitled *Ayyat al-Rahman fee Jihad al-Afghan* (God's Signs in the Afghan Jihad). Part II will look at Azzam's history and his theories of what needed to be done to defend Muslim lands under assault. Part III will explore a book on Azzam's views on the remedy for Muslim victimization.

Reading Azzam represents the cutting edge towards understanding a sworn enemy of the United States, and it is incumbent that American military planners immerse themselves in the ideology, mythology, language and strategy of Islamist militant groups. Azzam is as significant strategically to al-Qaida and its affiliates as Carl von Clausewitz is to the study of conventional warfare. Azzam founded *Maktab al-Khidmat* (Services Office for Arab Jihadists), an organization dedicated to organizing Arab jihadists fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, he was mentor to Usama Bin Laden and Azzam was killed in a massive bombing of his car in the streets of Peshawar, Pakistan in November 1989. The assassination of Azzam remains a subject of speculation and is unsolved. The copy of Azzam's *Ayyat al-Rahman fee Jihad al-Afghan* used in the crafting of this review essay was published in 1988 by Dar-al-Mujtama Publishers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The book is 192 pages.

Militant Afghan Jihadist Abdul-Rassul Sayyaf Writes a Preface

Azzam opens with a dedication *to the fighters in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, the Philippines, Lebanon and Kashmir, as well as all those who are writing spectacular acts of heroism with their blood in the Hindu Kush Mountains* (of Afghanistan). The preface was written by Abdul-Rasul Sayyaf who along with Gulbuddin Hekmetyar represent the most violent and militant factions of the Afghan warlords fighting the Soviets. Azzam always had his fatwas, books and writings endorsed by leading clerics and Afghan warlords as a means of marketing his

ideas to the wider Muslim world. It is a tactic Bin Laden has not effectively used as well as Azzam, who is trained as a cleric and had many clerical colleagues and counterparts as well as connections with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, during its early formation. Sayyaf writes that this book is for all lovers of jihad and those with a fervent determination to establish an Islamic state in which *dawa* (evangelism and the call to Islam) can spread. This book (by Azzam) is also for those Muslims who have forgotten the power of Islam and who are overwhelmed by the technology of their enemies (USSR, US, and Israel). They (Muslims) have not paid attention to the power of *iman* (faith) and this book is presented as proof of the power of faith in God. Victory is for those devoted in belief. Sayyaf endorses Azzam as a man who is steeped in Islam and has lived among the Afghans and their jihad against the Soviets.

Sayyaf writes that the Prophet Muhammad did not divide his community into a mercantile and warrior class, or left the fighting only to the poor. Sayyaf like many Islamist militants views Muhammad from the lens of warrior, and never takes time to highlight the complexity of 7th century Arabia and how Muhammad governed different religions and tribes as leader of Medina. He also discredits the Prophet Muhammad, who urged cooperation of different faiths, to preserve Medina from the desire of the Meccan oligarchy to extinguish him and his society. Sayyaf condemns all those who doubt the power of faith as being immersed in amassing worldly possessions. Note that Sayyaf does not outright condemn fellow Muslims who do not share his view as apostates. In the mid-eighties the objective was to recruit as many Muslim fighters and donors to the Soviet jihad as possible. Sayyaf argues that the issue of jihad has grown from a regional issue to a wider Islamic issue, and that the Afghans initially faced Soviet forces with rocks, boulders and primitive weapons before acquiring machine guns and other modern weapons of guerilla war. He ends by saying that God is stronger than the Soviet Union and that as God can never be defeated, then the only rational outcome is the defeat of the Soviet Union.

Azzam's Preface and Argument on What is Wrong with the Muslim World

Azzam then lays out his own preface, saying *the Afghan (Soviet War) issue is the story of Islam wounded in every part of the globe. Where nation-states have ripped it (Islamic nations) apart in every age and every era.* The Afghan war, is the same as the situation in Palestine, Chad, Philippines, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. "Those (Muslims) who prefer imperial enslavement to foreign rulers; instead of God's glory," Azzam proclaims. All jihads in Azzam's definition are sacred warfare and *are interrelated and form a singular chain from which the next operation, war or*

conflict will be born. In other words, Azzam looks upon Afghanistan as only the start of a momentum of jihad that is perpetual conflict. Azzam writes that the Soviet-Afghan War, at a minimum, gives the Palestinians something to look up to and aspire towards. Talk of the Afghan jihad is interrelated to the Palestinian one, in that Azzam labels both conflict and jihads as *fard ayn* (a collective obligation) incumbent upon every Muslim. See part I of this series for a detailed explanation of Azzam's fatwa (religious edict) making jihad a collective obligation using the emotionalism and politics of the Soviet-Afghan War. The Muslim warrior, Azzam urges, must not surrender or loose faith, but should go from area to area, from trench to trench to keep his spirit and self alive.

Azzam's Remedy: Al-Qaida al-Sulba (The Firm Foundation)

Like many of his books, Azzam postulates a strategy of establishing *Al-Qaida al-Sulba* (a firm foundation) in which the war in Afghanistan causes fighters to contemplate the possibilities of Palestine. After the Soviet-Afghan war the next objective is organizing a march against Jerusalem. What is revealing is Azzam's admission that he has received letters and calls from Europe, the United States, and the Arab world to permit the publication of this specific book in their respective communities. For Azzam the Soviet-Afghan War is the most important event in the 20th century Islamic world, and he writes this conflict will serve as a momentum for wider Islamic action towards global jihad; redemption for two centuries of defeat and humiliation. Azzam's anti-western diatribe declares that the west (he means the United States primarily) has defeated or co-opted Zionism, Bolshevism, and what Azzam calls the Yellow Peril (the Japanese Empire in World War II); and that the enemy now is Islam. Azzam infused into his followers the clash of civilizations that Bin Laden now espouses.

Azzam attempts to convince readers that the Afghan warlords are true Muslims and says that 90 percent do not neglect to pray daily and in communion. He says that God is with the mujahideen and signs abound of this such as:

- A flight of birds that preceded a Soviet tactical airstrike. (That is birds take flight as a warning from God that the Soviet low tactical airstrike is on its way).
- The liberation that placing your individual fate in God's hands that jihad provides liberating the believer from the shackles of material endeavors.

With each passing day in combat, your individual cares and worries of this world fade as you devote your body and soul to the service of God through combat.

These descriptions give those who tactically engage jihadists a glimpse into their beliefs. More importantly, how attune they attempt to be with their surroundings, be it in a mountainous region or urban setting. Azzam is concerned that such wild stories he tells, such as the sweet smells of recently killed jihadists, undermines the Soviet jihad. He responds by equating his group and the mujahideen who fight the Soviets with the Ansar; Medinese helpers who offered the Prophet Muhammad asylum and shelter from the Meccan genocide, and who talked of angels fighting alongside Muhammad and his allies against the larger Meccan force at the Battle of Badr (624 AD). Azzam's genius is his ability to weave together an ideological web, of rationalizing the modern Cold War with seventh century Islam, into a fantasy ideology that deludes the less educated into following his jihad against the Soviets, then Israel, at the time he harbored only contempt and ideological hatred for the United States. Anyone who argues with Azzam's fantasy ideology or undermines his stories of the sacrifices of the Muslims against the Soviets *is an unbeliever anyway and beyond redemption*.

Azzam's Fantasy Descriptions of War

Among the miracles outlined by Azzam in this book, aside from the previously mentioned birds flying before a Soviet heliborne or tactical air strike, are:

- scorpions that do not sting the Muslim fighters,
- corpses of martyrs that do not decay,
- fog that arrives to shield the Afghan and Arab fighters,
- enemy rounds that do not explode,
- a bullet that hit the belt of Afghan mujahideen leader Haqqani,
- martyrs who refused to relinquish their weapon except to a Muslim, and
- martyrs smiling in death.

As incredible as this mythology may sound, it is what sustains fighters who have been engaged with the Soviets from 1979 to 1989. In addition, behind this mythology are fighters who feel the land, mountains, rocks and weather are on their side by the grace of God. It is almost certain the Iraqi insurgency shares in mythological and fantasy stories of battle against Coalition forces. The skill is

to discover them and expose them as fantasies so as not to have them delude those misguided and uneducated to joining the jihad.

Azzam was also very conscious about distancing the Soviet-Afghan War as a Sunni Islamic victory and did not want the momentum gained from this conflict to be equated or linked to the Shiite driven 1979 Iranian Revolution. Azzam's attack upon the United States begins with the premise that the west will never permit the establishment of an Islamic state, and that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan will be done under the oversight and negotiation of the United States. He simplifies the complex policies pursued by a number of nations to frustrate Soviet designs on Afghanistan that included Pakistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and many other nations.

Azzam's Strategic Vision of the Post-Soviet Jihad

Azzam then turns to discuss the post-Soviet Afghanistan he envisions which does not include King Zahir Shah, the exiled monarch in Rome; saying it is impossible because the warlords Sayyaf and Hekmetyar oppose it. He mentions a Russian formula for an Islamic state in Afghanistan, in which a buffer zone is created in Northern Afghanistan manned by Syrian troops (a Soviet Arab client state). This formulation cannot be found in any mainstream literature on the Soviet-Afghan War, and it is unknown where and if Azzam simply created the conspiracy. Azzam, and the two warlords Sayyaf and Hekmetyar stand against King Zahir Shah, his ministers and their draft constitution. Azzam explains that Sayyaf received the *bayaa* (oath of fealty) within Islam's holiest shrine, the *Kaaba* (cuboid structure in Mecca, believed by Muslims to be the house Adam and then Abraham; built for the worship of God). Sayyaf spent two hours within the Kaaba, and received 42 out of 57 votes in the Shura Council; therefore he feels he has more legitimacy than King Zahir Shah. Of course, Azzam never mentions the Shura Council, only represented a faction of the Pashtun tribes, and neglected the other Afghan tribes and ethnic groups including even Gilzai Pashtuns.

Azzam discusses the inspiration the Afghan mujahideen and their Arab allies in the field drew from the collective punishment system instituted by former Soviet Premier Konstantin Chernenko. This only increased the resolve of popular support in the country side and those refugees crossing into Pakistan filled the camps and *madrassas* (religious schools with a politicized agenda) with materials to stoke hatred and recruit a new generation of fighters. Azzam tells readers that God has favored the Afghan with terrain conducive to jihad. He

describes the open porous borders over 2,200 kilometers along the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan and thousands more kilometers of Afghanistan's borders with Iran. Those uncontrolled areas and regions that fall to mujahideen control have *shariah* (Islamic law) courts and schools immediately established. Azzam is marketing this aspect of the jihad with the effort of combat being the spread of Islam through *dawa* (evangelism). The violence and compulsion part expressly forbidden in the Quran does not seem to trouble the late cleric. Azzam takes pride that some Soviet aid was diverted to building schools and camps supportive of the jihadist efforts. Some aid even went to fund the mujahideen through bribery, forged receipts and corruption. Azzam writes the Soviets could not differentiate between schools and their curricula.

Afghanistan borders Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. The jihadist spirit will spread there next until all five Islamic (*former* Soviet Republics) lands, are conquered, liberated and unified. These, Azzam writes are former Islamic lands whose borders were artificially created by the Soviets.

Azzam's Solutions and Fantasy Descriptions Molded into Operational Plans

Azzam delves into extremely unsubstantiated pronouncements about the Soviet-Afghan War, which although incredible must be evaluated as this is considered a reality by our adversaries. These include:

- 330,000 Mujahideen are fighting 200,000 Soviets, the numbers are questionable.
- The United States wishes to perpetuate the Soviet-Afghan War. No further explanation is given about the Cold War context of this conflict.
- Jihad is a *fard ayn* (collective obligation) if the infidel is physically invading Muslim lands or if Muslims remain incarcerated in infidel lands.
- If you blindly accept Azzam's premise that jihad is a collective obligation, then he goes on to say that the jihad is incumbent upon all Afghans and those Muslim nations that border Afghanistan into an area of 88 kilometers. Why this distance is unexplained.
- Collective obligation means fighting or providing logistical support in the form of funds, food, donations, facilitation, recruitment and visas. It includes Muslims with technical skills such as engineers, doctors, journalists and those with military training to participate. Azzam is obsessed with recruiting doctors, photojournalists and journalists in particular to the Soviet-Afghan jihad.

- This ordination of Azzam's which he writes not only applies to Afghanistan but Palestine as well.

Azzam then lays out what he sees people should do to support the Soviet-Afghan War. He begins by appealing to every Muslim institute and college to dedicate one day a week as a victory day for the Soviet jihad. Using this day to hold donation drives; Azzam then wants the Arab media to dedicate columns and airtime to raise public awareness of the Soviet jihad. He asks each Muslim family to allocate one day's household maintenance to support the Afghan jihad against the Soviets. Azzam encourages that trips be organized to Peshawar to make Muslims aware and feel part of what is occurring in Pakistan as a result of Soviet oppression in Afghanistan. Note the way Azzam attempts to empower society at all levels. Azzam does not end there but appeals to doctors to dedicate one month a year to live among the Afghans in refugee camps in Pakistan and better yet serve as a combat doctor with the *mujahideen*. Azzam also requests that journalists embed themselves with *mujhaideen* units to report the war and heroism of the jihadist fighters. He ends his appeals with what he sees are steps to empower Muslims through various forms of jihad by asking each Arab country to allow an Afghan *Mujahideen* Aid Office be open in their respective cities.

Conclusion

The book ends with a plea for a donation and even providing bank account numbers for wire transfers to *Bait al-Mal* (House of Donations) Kuwait, account number 1920 or the Dubai Islamic Bank account number 1335. The final sentence is a rallying cry from Azzam, "*Muslims awake before this (jihad) opportunity passes you by.*" Azzam wanted to export the fighting lessons and firm foundations (*al-Qaida al-Sulba*) built upon the cleansing qualities of (violent) jihad to Palestine and the former Islamic Republics of the Soviet Union. Just because Azzam has been dead for over a decade does not negate this ultimate strategic objective. With current references to Khurasan, Chechnya and Bokhara, and Samarkand there are also references to the former Islamic frontiers of eastern central Asia and the former Islamic Republics of the Soviet Union. It is also important for readers to look beyond Shiekh Azzam's fantasy ideology and appreciate the strategic, operational and tactical advice he has bequeathed to al-Qaida, Hamas and many other Islamist militant groups. His beatification into the realm of martyr cleric began soon after his assassination in November 1989, and took its ultimate expression in the posthumous book of his collected sermons published in 1992 entitled *Al-Tarbiah al-Jadidah wal Binaa* (New Self-discipline and

Reconstruction) published first in Peshawar, Pakistan and then made available in the Middle East through a Jerusalem Printing House. It is perhaps the best distillation of Azzam's Islamist militant theories and starts with an attack on Sufism, Bahais, and Sunni groups who are attempting to rationalize and ideologically attack the one-sided interpretations of jihad he and his radical Sunni-Salafist groups espouse. Azzam thinks in terms of not just victory against the Soviets but in terms of Islamic generations to come. He is obsessed with leaving a legacy that has been manifested in large measure by Usama Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. The very name of Al-Qaida has its origins in Azzam's sermons and writings. It is not database or the base, but a firm foundation in which:

- (1) one *manhaj* (Islamic legal system) prevails (there are four major schools of Sunni Islamic law, a multitude of Shiite sects, and various Sufi sects in Islam),
- (2) a Fundamentalist interpretations (as espoused by Azzam) are put into practice,
- (3) a firm foundation of self-disciplined fighters forms the vanguard to defend oppressed Muslims around the globe; going from one conflict to the next,
- (4) a person is measured based on their *taqwa* (piety),
- (5) Islamist (radical) movements mitigate their divisions and come together in a unified cause, and
- (6) Salafis see a global perspective in regards to Islam and not the day to day practices or regional benefits but global Muslim benefits.

Azzam, like Bin Laden, and Zawahiri are the modern manifestations of Ibn Taymiyya (1296-1328 AD). This essay will end with what Azzam writes about Ibn Taymiyyah, a founding father radicalist and destructive Islamist interpretator, to leave the reader to ponder the deep ideological roots of our enemy. Azzam writes that Ibn Taymiyyah's last days were in prison; silenced and banned from preaching and demonizing fellow Muslims as well as declaring Muslims who disagree with him apostates. He tells his captors that my paradise is not of this earth but is in my soul. He proceeds to continue writing his condemnation of Muslims who thought differently than he on the walls of the Damascus prison cell. Six-hundred years later, Azzam notes Saudi oil money propagated Ibn Taymiyyah across the globe. It is not Islam that we are at war with, but a narrow subsection that condemns Muslim and non-Muslim alike for using the books of Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayid Qutb, Abu Ala-al-Mawududi, and Azzam. This ideology must be discredited and attacked as part of undermining

al-Qaida, and other Islamist radicals who wish to impose only one Islam upon a diverse Muslim population.

Editor's Note: LCDR Aboul-Enein is considered one of the most dynamic thinkers on Islamist militant ideology. He has had the privilege of advising at the highest levels of the Defense Department, serving the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 2002 to 2006. LCDR Aboul-Enein is currently a Defense Department Middle East Analyst. He wishes to thank the John T. Hughes Library in Washington DC, the Library of Congress for making Azzam's book available for analysis and study. LCDR Aboul-Enein wishes to thank CAPT Eugene Smallwood, MSC, USN at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy for his insightful edits and comments that enhanced this work. CAPT Smallwood has also been a friend, supporter and mentor over the years.